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# Christmas Expectations

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# Christmas Expectations

## **Abstract**

"Hope is made of sterner stuff. Definitions include 'to anticipate with expectation of fulfillment' and 'grounds for believing that something good may happen'."

Posting about living in hope from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/christmas-expectations/>

## **Keywords**

In All Things, Advent, Christmas, hope, Magi

## **Disciplines**

Christianity

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

# Christmas Expectations

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 [inallthings.org/christmas-expectations/](http://inallthings.org/christmas-expectations/)

Howard Schaap

Ironically, I've always read the wise men showing up in Jerusalem and asking about the "King of the Jews" as a naïve move on their part—as if "wise men" means star-gazing visionaries without any sense of the political realities of the time. Weren't they wise enough to realize that showing up in Herod the Great's place suggesting he's a pretender to the throne is a way to get someone—perhaps even themselves—killed?

If the wise men have hope in this child, it seems in this reading, it's a hope akin to the fool's faith—a blind and dangerous one. And babies die in Bethlehem because of it. That seems inexcusable.

But hope is made of sterner stuff. Definitions include "to anticipate with expectation of fulfillment" and "grounds for believing that something good may happen."

Perhaps the place to start, especially in this case, is with the "grounds for believing." These magi from the east knew something about what they saw written in the heavens. If a star itself could announce the birth of a king, then they had little to fear from an earthly ruler, murderer though he was. They had grounds for their hope, and so upon arrival, and having had a good long time to think about it—this is not a spur-of-the-moment decision—they walk boldly into Jerusalem and, by a passive-aggressive question, remind Herod the Great that he is certainly not the king of the Jews. There's only one thing that could give grounds for that kind of hope: a sign in the heavens.

Then, too, these wise men don't go waltzing into Jerusalem without expectation. If they were as savvy as they seem—and if the star is as specific as scripture says—it should have been no problem to find the baby on their own, deliver the gifts, and slink quietly back to "the east." However, these wise men expect this King to change things, and they're willing to play their part by telling a tyrant about it to his face—not once, but, as evidenced by the dream that warned them away after their visit, twice.

Christmas is one of our most cynical holidays. We most often live in a false "already"—we got our bonuses and so can keep up the status quo of Christmas, adding one more gift than last year because this is all we expect—or the unattainable "not yet"—the hope of Christmas doesn't actually mean that we expect peace in Syria or the proper reception for refugees or improved relationships with our spouses; we understand this to be a figure of speech that leads us to despair, with or without presents.

I have to admit I'm not sure how to live in the hope of the wise men. They're hope seems otherworldly. It seems to me there's enough brash actions in the world in the name of hoped-for results. But of course, I don't have to walk in to the Bashar al-Assad's office to declare that Jesus is come; I can start a whole lot closer to home.